

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please substitute the following claims for the same-numbered claims in the application:

Claims 1-13 (Canceled).

14. (Currently Amended) A method for honoring electronic coupons utilizing computing equipment, said method comprising:

an issuing party issuing an electronic coupon to a customer;

said customer presenting said coupon for redemption to a redemption party~~[[;]]~~, said redemption party being non-competitive from said issuing party;

said redemption party transmitting said coupon to an authentication party for authentication, said authentication party being different than said issuing party;

said authentication party using said computing equipment to determine ~~determining~~ whether said coupon is authentic;

said authentication party charging said redemption party a fee upon determination that said coupon is authentic;

said authentication party passing said fee to said issuing party;

said redemption party honoring said coupon from said customer; ~~and~~
upon said honoring, said redemption party seeking reimbursement of said fee from said issuing party; and

said issuing party reimbursing said fee to said redemption party.

15. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 14, wherein after said presenting, said method further comprising said redemption party verifying validity of said coupon with said issuing party.

16. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 15, further comprising establishing the validity of said coupon using an electronic signature.

17. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 16, wherein in said establishing said electronic signature is achieved by public key cryptography.
18. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 14, wherein prior to said issuing, said method further comprising said authentication party issuing a plurality of blank said coupons to said issuing party for subsequent use.
19. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 18, wherein in said issuing a plurality of blank said coupons to said issuing party for subsequent use, said coupons include variable fields that are generated by one-way hash functions.
20. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 14, wherein in ~~said determining the~~ determination of whether said coupon is authentic, said authentication party determines authenticity of a received coupon by checking whether one-way hash functions included in said coupons are valid.
21. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 20, wherein in ~~said determining the~~ determination of whether said coupon is authentic, said authentication party further determines authenticity of said received coupon by checking whether said received coupon has been used before.
22. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 21, wherein in said determining, upon checking that said received coupon has not been used before, said authentication party issuing a validity certificate to said redeeming party.
23. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 20, wherein in said honoring, said redeeming party providing said issuing party with a proof of purchase of an item for which said coupon is being applied toward.
24. (Currently Amended) An electronic coupon device ~~having a plurality of data fields, said electronic coupon~~ comprising:

a coupon identifier electronic component;
a coupon authentication verification function field electronic component; and
a secure signature function field electronic component bearing a signature of an issuing party computing device of said electronic coupon device,

wherein said coupon identifier electronic component and said coupon authentication verification function field electronic component are adapted to be verified only by an

authentication party computing device, said authentication party computing device being different than said issuing party computing device.

25. (Currently Amended) The electronic coupon device of claim 24, further comprising a customizable information function field electronic component adapted to retain information maintained by said issuing party computing device and said authentication party computing device.

26. (Currently Amended) An electronic commerce system facilitating electronic coupon issuance and redemption, said electronic commerce system comprising:

at least one issuing party ~~component~~ computing device adapted to issue an electronic coupon to a customer;

at least one redemption party ~~component~~ computing device adapted to electronically receive said electronic coupon for redemption[[;]], said redemption party computing device being non-competitive from said issuing party computing device; and

an authentication party ~~component~~ computing device in communication with said issuing party ~~component~~ computing device and said redemption party ~~component~~ computing device, said authentication party ~~component~~ computing device being different than said issuing party ~~component~~ computing device;

wherein said redemption party ~~component~~ computing device is adapted to transmit a received electronic coupon to said authentication party ~~component~~ computing device for authentication,

wherein said authentication party ~~component~~ computing device is adapted to charge said redemption party ~~component~~ computing device a fee and to pass said fee to said issuing party ~~component~~ computing device, and

wherein said redemption party ~~component~~ computing device being further adapted to honor said electronic coupon and seek reimbursement from said issuing party ~~component~~ computing device, and

wherein said issuing party computing device being further adapted to reimburse said fee to said redemption party computing device.

27. (Currently Amended) The electronic commerce system of claim 26, wherein said electronic coupon comprises:

a coupon identifier;

a coupon authentication verification function field; and

a secure signature function field bearing a signature of an issuing party of said electronic coupon,

wherein said coupon identifier and said coupon authentication verification function field are adapted to be verified only by said authentication party ~~component~~ computing device.

28. (Currently Amended) The electronic commerce system of claim 27, wherein said electronic coupon further comprising a customizable information function field adapted to retain information maintained by said issuing party ~~component~~ computing device and said authentication party ~~component~~ computing device.

29. (Currently Amended) The electronic commerce system of claim 26, wherein said issuing party ~~component~~ computing device comprises a promotion definition ~~component~~ computing device adapted to define a promotion scheme for said issuing party ~~component~~ computing device.

30. (Currently Amended) The electronic commerce system of claim 29, wherein said issuing party ~~component~~ computing device further comprises a distribution ~~component~~ computing device.

device adapted to handle distribution of said electronic coupon to said customer based on said promotion scheme.

31. (Currently Amended) The electronic commerce system of claim 30, wherein said issuing party ~~component~~ computing device further comprises a clearing ~~component~~ computing device adapted to receive a redeemed electronic coupon from said customer.

32. (Currently Amended) The electronic commerce system of claim 26, wherein said authentication party ~~component~~ computing device comprises a unique electronic identifier different from an electronic identifier of said issuing party ~~component~~ computing device.

33. (Currently Amended) The electronic commerce system of claim 26, wherein said authentication party ~~component~~ computing device comprises a database of redeemed electronic coupons.